

Trip Report, Namibia 2014

Saturday, 9 August (Home to Upington. 1176km, 13.5hrs)

Having packed until late, but finished, the previous night, there was not much sleep had before the alarm woke us to get up and get going. It was dark, it was cold but we got away relatively punctually and off we went to Engen in Pmb to tank up on diesel (Mike) and on water, sweets and snacks (Gudrun). And after that we were really on our way. Listening to the radio and watching the kilometers start to count upwards the further away we got from Pietermaritzburg. As we reached Harrismith, the sun rose and we were ready for a break. Armed with toasted sandwiches we kept the break as short as possible and on we went. At Kestell we encountered a rain shower or two but that was to be the last rain we experienced for the next few weeks. It was a long, hard day's driving and sitting in the cab.



Orange River at Groblershoop

As we arrived in Upington, we programmed the GPS to find the B&B I had singled out to stay over for the night. On arrival, not a good plan. The offroad parking area was a car park and there was no ways that our vehicle would fit under that. Next option was Libby's Lodge (to be highly recommended). We had a lovely modern apartment, safe off road parking and free wifi. Having ordered pizza delivery for dinner, we caught up on emails while we still could and WhatsApped with friends and family.

A not too late night was on the cards as while this had been a long, long day there was another one ahead of us tomorrow.

Sunday 10 August (Upington to Windhoek. 978km, 12.5hrs)

After the obligatory cup of coffee in the wee hours of the morning, we again hit the road before the sun rose. The road stretched ahead of us, long and straight. We made good time to the border crossing and apart from the officials on duty preferring to stand in the first rays of the morning sun than stamp our passports, that did eventually happen and after half an hour, in total for both border posts, we were on our way again, in Namibia, en route to Windhoek. All the long hours in the vehicle in the cramped space were starting to take their toll on me and I became very uncomfortable as my feet felt incredibly hot and because more and more oedemic.

At the first possible opportunity and chance we stopped in Karasburg to get a local sim card. The Spar did not have but the Save shop across the road did. After a 45 minute delay (we could not get the card to work - somebody had to phone



it to activate it!) we were on our way again. As a result we arrived in Windhoek as the sun was already beginning to set. A slightly stressful situation between us arose. We had not booked prior to our arrival and the Windhoek Guest House which I had chose told us, upon phoning, that there were no rooms available. We tried the second option on my list but that was totally unsuitable as it was on a steep hill and Mike had wanted to change the oil in the vehicle. So now it was resorting to driving around and finding something suitable for us to spend the night. Tempers were, to stay the least, a tad frayed at this point and the cab of the landy was definitely too small for the

"Pit stop" somewhere between the border and Karasburg

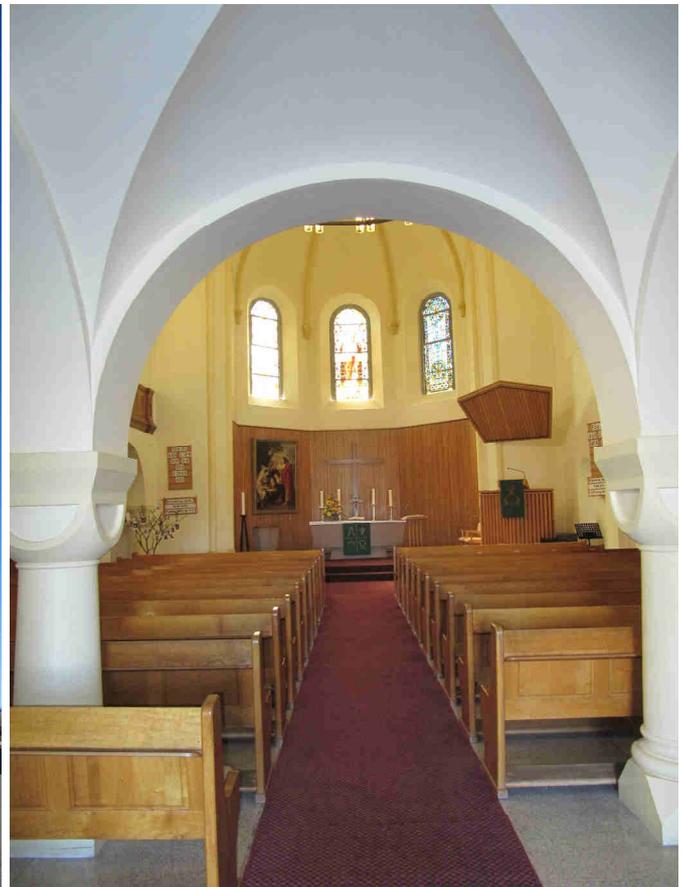


two of us. Driving around Klein Windhoek we saw the sign indicating we were at the Guest House and on the off chance we stopped and asked at reception if there was a room available. Yes, a few. Really – liar the gentleman who had answered the phone and said they were ‘full’. We signed in, paid and were taken to our room. After a quick drink we went through to the main building to have dinner in their restaurant. The portions were *massive* and having managed as much of my chicken schnitzel as possible we took the rest back to our room and Michael was then, on the following day able to

supplement his lunch with the leftovers. It was a very early night as we were both shattered.

Monday 11 August

The day started with Gudrun waking up as Mike was starting to make the coffee. He calmly mentioned that he had made a mistake and that instead of the original 2 hours travelling he had thought the day would entail, it was instead going to be a 4-5 hour trip. He obviously saw the look on my face and as an almighty scream was starting to develop in my throat, he realised he had better find a solution fast. He quickly said, but we have not booked anywhere and there is no reason we could not spend today in Windhoek and carry on travelling tomorrow. The scream stayed silent, never being birthed as with utter relief and total alacrity I accepted this offer. The day then changed to being leisurely with a breakfast at the Guesthouse, followed by a tour of the city of Windhoek, after having secured some much needed oil for the transfer box. We criss crossed the city several times, avoiding shopping centres as our vehicle height did not permit entrance to parkades. We also were on a mission to find a six pin plug for the aprs tracker – but to no avail. In between the driving and searching, we did take time to do the touristy bit, and despite the numerous times we have both been in Windhoek, we had never been into the Christuskirche or seen the parliament buildings.



Christuskirche, Windhoek

We did this time. When we had had enough, we went to the newest Spar Superstore – what a treat!! From the most amazing selection of cheeses, to breads, to cakes to meats – all very, very German. It was a pure delight.

We bought the necessary for lunch, for our travels and for Mike to be able to effect the oil change and then went back to the Guesthouse. While I read and slept, Mike did the oil change and various other modifications



Joe's Beer House

and what not at and to the vehicle. Once I woke up, and resumed reading, he had a late afternoon snooze. What really impressed us is the true integration, at ground root level, of the various nationalities and cultures. There is, as is the case in every country, noise about a demonstration that was to be held today against the Government's third constitutional change which will result in even greater powers and monies in the hands of the President and the Swapo ruling party.

In the early evening we took ourselves off to Joe's Beerhouse. It was as awesome as we remembered it and we had a lovely meal. Next to us were two young girls – a Canadian masters student in geology and a Himba associate of hers. We had some interesting exchanges and conversations before we left for a relatively early night. Not quite, as I had whatsapped Heike in Oman and she took it upon herself to phone and hold a conversation bringing me up to speed about the latest developments regarding family matters etc.



The Open Tracker is strapped to the right of the radio. The laptop is showing the results 😊

After our failure to find a computer shop which stocked old computer cables in their junk box, containing 6 pin plugs to use for programming the Open Tracker (APRS unit), I managed to short out the required pins on the unit, using thin cables from a network cable which I brought along, reset it and reprogram it.

I was chuffed as the Open Tracker was now sending the right signals to the radio, which then broadcast our position via hf radio. What made the testing and checking easier is that the local ham, who operated the Namibian APRS iGate, lived just down the road, so signals were strong for testing. Will see tomorrow how well the tracking goes.

Tuesday, 12 August (Windhoek to Kamajab. 476km, 7 hours)

We left Windhoek this morning at about 10am. It was much warmer already than yesterday and both had our sweaters off before we set off on our travels. Between Windhoek and Otjiwarongo we saw four large troops of baboons, plus, wait for it 14 lots of warthog!! 11 were families, 3 were batchelors on their own. All animals just next to the road! We also saw various birds of prey, a legawaan, a tortoise (well I saw it, Mike was concentrating on the road) with a shell approximately the size of a dinner plate. It was truly amazing and really nice.

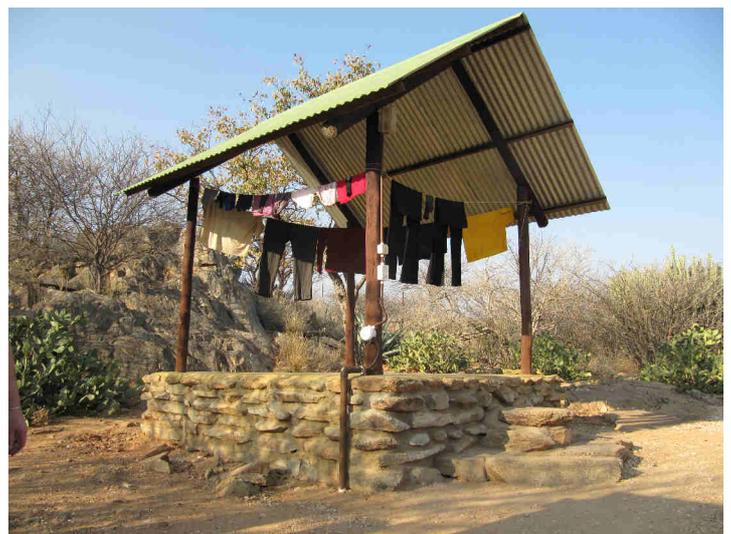
In Otjiwarongo we filled up with diesel, all three tanks and then continued to our current destination of Oppie-Koppi in Kamanjab. We stopped a few times along the way, just briefly and it was significantly hotter today than the previous days. Once or twice Mike, out of pity for me, switched on the aircon. But only for short spells. I realised that it would be all the more difficult arriving at our destination with the aircon full blast, and then having to climb out of the vehicle. We topped up diesel in the village before coming through to the camp site.



Oppie Koppie

Oppie Koppie was not quite what I had expected and I was hot and bothered and just wanted to see if we could maybe change from camping to a chalet – but not at the prices they quoted us! So, Mike fetched a basin with ‘luke’ cool water for me to put my feet into, poured us a drink and things started to settle.

Having put washing into one of our buckets this morning complete with soap and water, we each got a container to rinse them in and I did the first rinse, Mike the second, and then he hung them out to dry. Shortly after that I took myself upstairs into the rooftop tent for a brief snooze and Mike played around with hf radio and antenna. This camp is definitely a stop over only!! The sounds of the ‘bush’ comprise a lonely but loud vuvuzela played monotonously and regularly over a lengthy period of time. Loud voices from the neighbouring township, much shouting and loud music. Ah well, ce la vie. It is for one night only. We have decided on a Spartan dinner – that is, I have. Poor Mike will be getting cheese and tomato rolls with fried eggs. Once we finally get to Epupa, life will resume at ‘normal’ camping pace and standards. For now, it is make do.



Wednesday, 13 August (Kamanjab to Epupa Falls. 441km, 7hrs 20 min)



This morning started with a bang, well, a siren actually, at 04h45 in the neighbouring township. This after we thought that the vuvuzelas, donkeys, and chicken noises were, bad. But at least the siren stopped. There was silence for 2 minutes, and then a morning sermon was delivered over loudspeakers. The guy must have been a horse race commentator in his former life. His enthusiasm did not wane – we were hoping that his voice would give in. Alas, he was well practiced at shouting the odds of the devil vs everything else. We tried putting up with it, as it would surely end at 05h00. He was still going hell for leather (excuse the pun) at

06h00, but lost steam there-after. It's one thing trying to experience "local is lekker", but this is definitely our last visit to Oppi Koppie. We definitely prefer the loud silence of the bush.

We broke up camp relatively early (no surprises here), and headed to the General Dealer in Kamajab, to get a blanket between the sheet and mattress, for more comfort for Mike's hips. They did not have, and pointed us to the shop next to the garage. It looks like nothing. It's run by a white family and stocks everything from sweets to bread to fanbelts and spark plugs. But no blankets. They pointed us to the site of a local construction company, who leases a shop to Chinese. Found it, but it was closed. When I asked one of the locals when it opens, he pointed to the sky, at about 11h00. Strange for Chinese to be lazy...

Off we went and headed north to Epupa Falls. Saw 2 lots of Giraffe just off the road in farm land, and then the mandatory goats, sheep, donkeys and cattle as we entered the area west of Etosha.

Shortly before Upuwo, our front right tyre said howzit. I managed to stop the vehicle safely in short time, but on inspection saw that the tyre repair kit I brought along with plugs etc would not help. The entire outer sidewall had distanced itself with the rest of the tyre with a long circular cut. On with another spare, and off we headed to Upuwo. The next veterinary point assured us that we would be able to find a



replacement tyre in Upuwo. I hoped that the make shift roadside stalls had a half decent replacement tyre. We found a proper tyre shop which had exactly one matching new tyre. He fitted and balanced this tyre after parting with R3780, which is not too bad I suppose in these circumstances, and we were off again.



Kunene Fitment Centre - well stocked and organised!

A search for the cause of the tyre burst revealed nothing – the damage probably masked the cause. What is particularly annoying is that I bought a tyre monitoring system from www.tireguard.co.za before the trip. It was installed before the trip as per instructions, adding each sensor and setting alarm levels. I however found that pressure and temperature updates were very slow, and temperatures inaccurate, as they were greatly influenced by the ambient

temperature. This is not surprising as the external sensors are totally exposed to the outside air. The sensor can just be seen in the 4 o'clock position in the picture above. Earlier today, the monitor gave a NOS message, showing that it had lost signal with a few sensors. As we stopped frequently (every 45min to 1 hr), I was not overly perturbed by this as I inspected and felt the tyres every time we stopped, and we were on tar roads. Anyway, the bottom line is that the R1850 did not warn me of a hot tyre or of low pressures. While it did not cause the tyre failure, it certainly did not help in averting it. I only purchased this brand as the TPMS I was interested in could not be set for pressures lower than 1 bar, whereas this one could, which is handy for soft sand driving. I re-registered all sensors at the tyre shop and will carry on monitoring the monitor.

We stopped at Pep Stores and got another blanket.

At Koos Verwy's camp in Epupa Falls, we were allocated a campsite in the back, next to the rubbish collection area, but were moved to a river front site after protesting. However, we cannot stay here tomorrow as well, as it is booked out. We enquired next door at Omarunga Lodge for a prime site, but they laughed and said impossible without booking in advance during high season. High season? Yes, high season is from the beginning of March to the middle of December! We were not aware of this. BTW, the Omarunga camp site is the one we originally stayed in a number of years ago. It's been upgraded, and the old charm of open reed enclosed showers and toilets in the centre is a thing of the past. Now they have "proper" ablutions, and also a swimming pool. All very flash.



Our campsite for the night at Epupa Falls Lodge



Fantastic view of the falls from the high wooden deck

Back here, in Koos Verwy's camp, we decided to order dinner. The choice is either Sirloin, Pork chops, Chicken, Fish or Oryx with either rice or chips. We thought that the asking price of R200 was a cheek, but ordered anyway. We don't get this chance every day, plus the view from the elevated deck over the falls is spectacular. The waitress arrived, and served tomato soup with freshly baked buns. This was followed with the main course, as described above, but with the addition of a fresh salad (what a treat in the desert) and vegetables. The meal



was rounded off with a chocolate pudding. All very nice and a great surprise after expecting a basic meal at exorbitant prices.

Both campsites have lost their appeal for us. While the ablution facilities etc are great, the campsites are small, and a favourite with tour companies who use their large trucks to buss tourists in. They are still great, but not for longer than a day or two.

Thursday, 14 August (Epupa Falls to Kunene River Lodge. 163km, 3.5hrs)

The morning was taken at a leisurely pace. Coffee in roof top tent brought to me by Mike, a game or two on my iPad and then a 'stroll' downstairs for a second cup of coffee. All around us people were packing up and moving off, tour groups, our neighbours and eventually the camp was empty – bar ourselves who were still lazily sorting and enjoying breakfast. The supervisor pitched, looking worried. Would we like her to move us to the campsite available at the back of the camp next to the entrance? No, thanks – we would be out of there by 10am. And we were.

Before leaving, Mike noted the GPS co-ords of the camp and took a brochure from them. On to the next door camp, some photos and quick hi to a group of guys from KZN, including Ted Pickering from New Hanover, busy sorting something on his front left suspension on his Ford. Then onwards and outwards. As has been the case every day of our travels, Mike had something to fret about. Today it was the fact that the CTEK DC/DC charger was not functioning. We travelled for some distance and then pulled over to see why the batteries were not charging properly – was worried that the batteries were too hot. I hung around the vehicle, patiently, only to be approached by a solitary Himba woman, indicating she had a headache, and looking suitable sorry for herself. Two Panado and a half a bottle of water later, she allowed me to take a photo of her as a fair exchange for my nursing abilities. All to Mike's satisfaction (batteries were cold, and the charger was not working properly – it was now bypassed) we carried on with our travels – the shortest day in the vehicle to date!

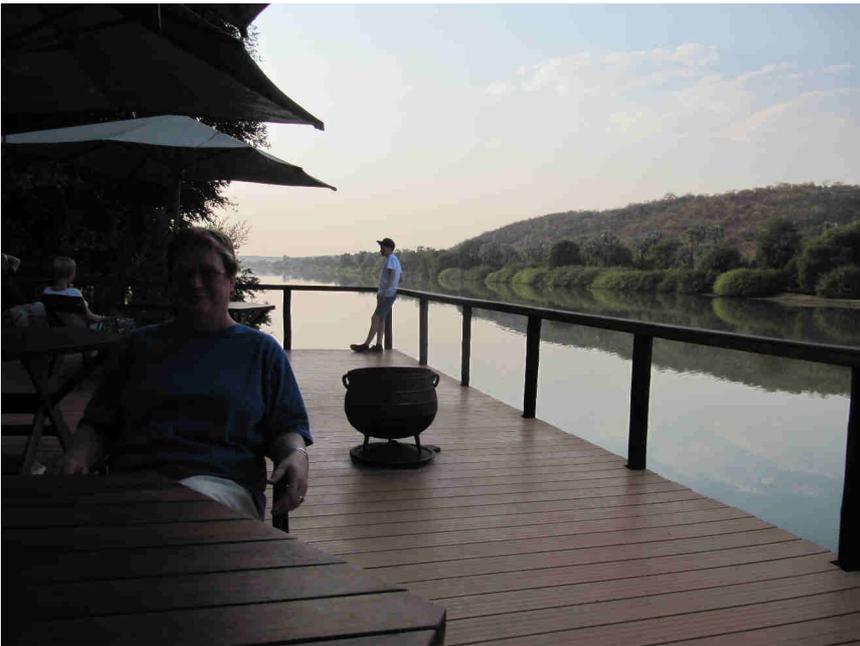
On the way, we stopped at the Dorslandtrekkers memorial, overlooking Swartbooisdrift on the Cuenene River.



Dorslandtrekkers Memorial



We arrived at Kunene River Lodge by midday, well shortly before 2pm, and signed in. We were given the most beautiful river front camp site. First things first – we sat down on the camping chairs and had a drink before tackling the unpacking of the vehicle and setting up camp. That done, it was off to find out about communication abilities. There is free wifi to be had, but the connectivity is seriously slow and laborious. Returning to camp, we spent the afternoon reading while I cooled my weary, hot and painful feet in a bowl of



cold water. For sundowners it was back to the deck – absolutely beautiful to watch the sunset while enjoying a glass of dry white wine with extra ice. Dinner comprised sausages, garlic bread, tomatoes, asparagus and gherkins. It was an early night for both of us.

Friday, 15 August

A truly lazy morning again, with me lying in. Mike found the mattress after a good night's sleep had become too thin for him and got up to make the coffee. Both of us enjoying the cooler weather after the heat of the

previous afternoon. Oats for breakfast, a stroll to the lapa for catching up on WhatsApp, Emails etc plus looking at where we are going to be going from here and what possible accommodation is to be sourced further down the trip, now that we know that most places are fully booked. Then we headed back to camp for quiet time and some enjoyable reading.

I (M)switched on my hf rig after rigging up a long line antenna into the trees, but found that the auto tuner was not working. I traced it down to a loose plug connection on the hf rig. Out with the rig and off with the covers, seeing that I have time on my hands ☺. I managed to sort the pins which were not making good contacts. Luckily no soldering iron was necessary, as I found out that I had left mine behind. After reinstalling the radio, I found that the auto tuner was now working flawlessly. Conditions for 40m were however dead, apart from one pirate commercial station, quite strong at 7120kHz – was probably operating from somewhere in Angola. I also



heard some stations on 20m – sounded like Portuguese hams. Tried to raise them, but could not get in due to the pile-up they caused. Switched off the rig.

Despite the oppressive heat, I (G) lay down for a snooze after lunch, Mike continuing to enjoy his read instead. He also occasionally called in CQ from the hf radio – but had no success in making any contacts.

Again we headed to the deck for a sundowner and to check on messages, plus the obligatory photo session, before heading back to camp and a braai dinner.

It cools down wonderfully after sunset and we enjoyed some quiet time in camp before heading off to bed.

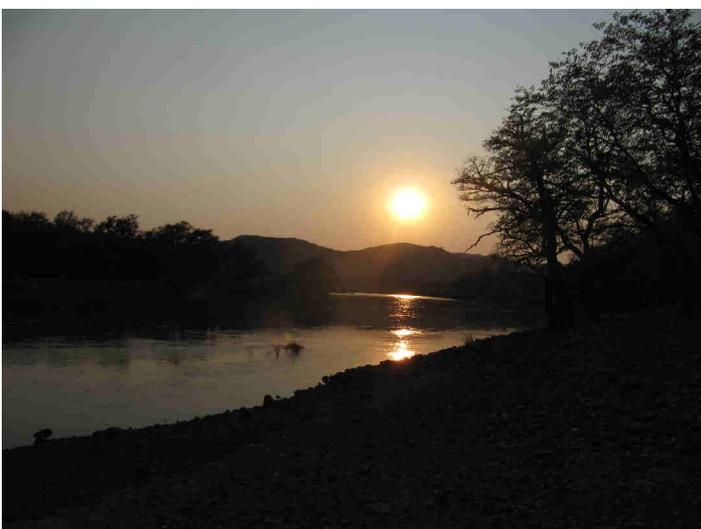
Saturday, 16 August

Today started out much as yesterday did. The difference being that we had a slap up breakfast with bacon and fried eggs. It is weekend after all. Up to the internet 'café' to send emails re future accommodation and post on facebook (Mike) plus check on other contact situ's. Then we headed back to camp and spent the following few hours reading, watching and photographing monkeys, squirrels etc. While up at the communication section this morning, I enquired as to the evening meal options. Mike and I decided that tonight was going to be dinner cooked for us – and no washing up. Tomorrow will be a very early start and an extremely long day in the vehicle again. Our journey takes us onwards with a two hour offroad trip along the river and then on to Rundu, via Ruacana, Oshakato and Eenanha. The tales continues



On the deck. Again.

Sunday, 17 August (Kunene River Lodge to Rundu. 761km, 11 hours)



Along the Cunene River on route to Ruacana

What an early start it was. We both got up at 5am, and finished packing the vehicle and showering leaving camp at 06h20. The morning was fresh and cool and we had a wonderful trip along the river for the first two hours of travelling, enjoying the sunrise, the plants, shrubs and of course the occasional view of the river. Then onto tar and off en route to Rundu. For Mike a lot of the travelling was a relive of the old governments 'free' holiday scheme for young men of more than 30 years ago. Although then the roads were of course much narrower and sand, as opposed to nowadays where they are tarred.

Between Ruacana and Oshakati, we stopped briefly to have a look at the canal next to the road. A minute or two after taking off, an alarm sounded and I thought that the tyre monitor was playing up again as usual. Unfortunately it was the Madman Engine Monitor moaning about the engine temperature – it was 120 degrees. I pulled off and opened the bonnet, and



On route to Ruacana

confirmed this. When I pulled off the road earlier, I switched off the engine immediately, and the water in the engine block must have started boiling, creating an air (steam) lock. I carefully opened the bleeding nut on the thermostat housing, letting some steam escape, so that water could flow back from the header tank into the

engine. After about 15 minutes, I was able to bleed the system properly, and off we went, hoping that no engine damage was done. This is the first time this has happened to me in over 300 thousand km in this vehicle. Thankfully I installed this Madman engine monitoring before the trip – it certainly saved the engine and the holiday.



The canal next to the main road is still there...

At Ruacana we tried to get to the dam wall and ended up going all the way to the Angolan border, but never the dam wall. Due to the long day ahead, we did not waste any further time here trying to find the dam wall. At Oshakati we stopped at the Spar for a last minute 'bigger' shop of still wanted/needed supplies. I stayed with the vehicle, read inside with all doors locked and engine running, while Mike went into the store to buy the necessary. As we parked the vehicle we were greeted by an armed guard, warning us of pickpockets and to hide all manner of items such as laptops, ipads, ipods, cameras etc. We acknowledged that we had been forewarned and that I would be staying with the vehicle. He was extremely kind, doing his rounds but regularly at short intervals returning to the vehicle and waiting just in front until Mike came back to it. Then a fill up of diesel meant we were good to go for the rest of the trip to Rundu.



Some small sections of Oshakati have not changed much in 30 years.

with vegetation starting on the verge of the road. The current road is tar of course, with about 50m of cleared vegetation on either side. Numerous villages and homesteads can be found along this road now, unlike back

All the towns, like Oshakati and Ondangwa have changed a lot in the last 30 years! Ondangwa is still cleaner now than Oshakati, as it was back then. The road north to Eenanha was an eye opener, as it was basically a village after the other, unlike the odd kraals back then. I remembered sections of Oom Willie se Pad, especially between Eenanha and Okongo, as we had to sweep the road weekly from Okongo, meeting the sweep team from Eenanha halfway. At least this was when we were in base camp relaxing after weekly patrols outside the camp. The road back then was a narrow gravel road,



Oom Willie se pad still as straight and long as before, only tarred and wider. For the first time on our trip, we saw the odd cloud along here.

then, when the odd kraal was hidden in the bushes. The road is quite beautiful with it's tall trees, but still, just as long and straight, and monotonous as back then.

Shortly after reaching the Kavango River and following it towards Rundu, we encountered a blue light brigade of high powered black cars (with flags on their fenders, numerous police vehicles and some ambulances and other

vehicles trailing behind, obviously unable to keep up with the pace of the front vehicles. When they saw us, two black cars moved into their right hand lane, forcing us to stop off the road. Hopefully our lot back home will not take pointers from these guys!



Part of the blue light brigade

We had booked at Kaisosi and arrived after 11 hours long travel. Our campsite was number eight Quite a difference after the luxury of Kunene River Lodge. Here campers were regarded as third class citizens, basically four to a campsite, each with own ablutions and braai facilities, but ‘lumped’ together in a little



Kaisosi - 4 campers lumped together. Not too bad for an overnight stop, but not for longer

square in the middle of the four sites. The water was hot, the neighbours were rowdy, very!, but we were too weary to really let it bother us. We had already upon arrival decided to only stay the night so we unpacked the bare minimum, heated up some left over steak from our previous braai, some garlic bread and baked beans, plus tomatoes and gherkins and that was pretty much us sorted.

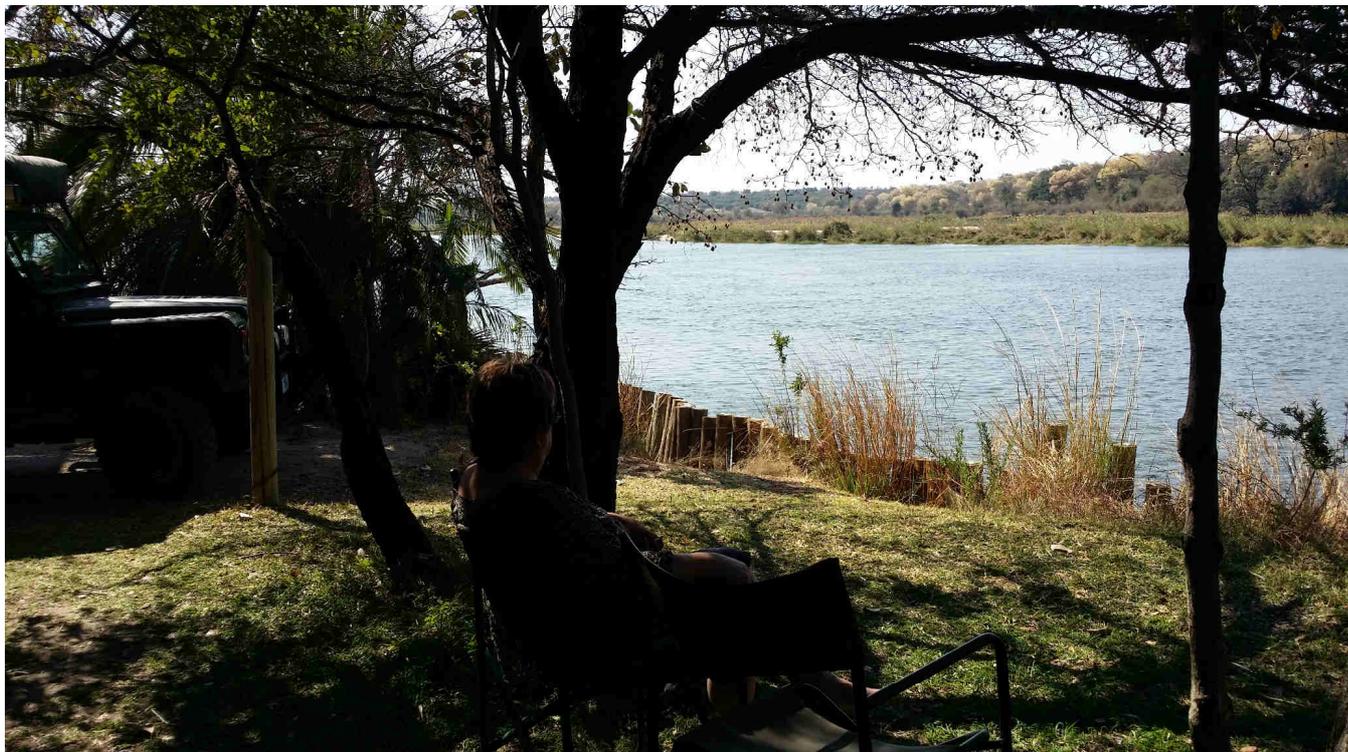
Monday, 18 August (Rundu – Divundu. 219km, 4 hrs)

This morning it was a leisurely couple of cups of coffee while Mike checked oil and water levels, played around with hf frequencies, packed the vehicle and we showered and got going. Yay – a short trip planned for today – only 2 hours on the road. We stopped in Divundu for diesel and to see if there were any Tafel beers to be bought (done at the second general dealer we stopped at) and off it went to Shometu River Lodge. The lodge is still in the process of being built so Shometu Camp Site would have suited it better as a name. It was really neat and clean with each



Our tree house at Ngepi

campsite having well watered grass on which to relax and clean and spacious ablution facilities but ... no river views and we wanted water. Promising to return if we found nothing else, we decided to carry on to Ngepi. Yes, it is huge and yes, there are a great many people, but still. There was no camping to be had for tonight but we enquired after the tree houses thinking one night in a tree house and two nights camping would possibly be in order.



That was until we saw the tree house. What a beaut!! We drove to look at the campsite we could get from tomorrow onwards and decided 'nah', it is a holiday after all and Mike booked us into our tree house for all three nights. It is right on the water front, has solar lighting and water heating, its own little shower (open air) and toilet and we absolutely love it.

The afternoon was spent lazing around, reading, Gudrun doing a load of washing, Mike putting up a clothes line and just for the most part enjoying the quiet and beauty. A couple of boats passed us on the river. Some were just sightseeing, others fishing, but it just all added to the ambience and tranquillity of this setting. As the afternoon got later we repeatedly heard the fish eagles call and saw a pair in a tree directly opposite us on the other side of the river. As the sun set we heard, very close by, the call of some hippo. What a dream to hear the frogs croak, en masse, see the starry night sky, enjoy the cooler temperatures and just 'be'. This is true bliss.

It's 18h50 now, and we just heard the first trumpet of an ellie.

Thankfully the engine behaved itself after the overheating stint of yesterday.



Ngepi reception area

Tuesday, 19 August

A wonderful lazy lie in, coffee watching the sun rise and listening again to the hippo and fish eagle, we eventually made our way to the reception area of Ngepi for breakfast, a choice of Continental or English and there is no need to guess which one we opted for either! Then Mike and I could not get connectivity to their free wifi service. No problem for my intrepid hubby – a quick nip behind the counter at reception and into the office to reset the router and gain access (here he will probably tell me I am wrong and describe what he did to get us connectivity in totally accurate terms! * see asterix notation at the end of this day's diary entry to get the 'true' story.) (M - I actually just found the router IP, logged into it and deleted some old assigned dhcp IPs as they had run out of spare IPs – careless of them to leave their router on the default admin password).

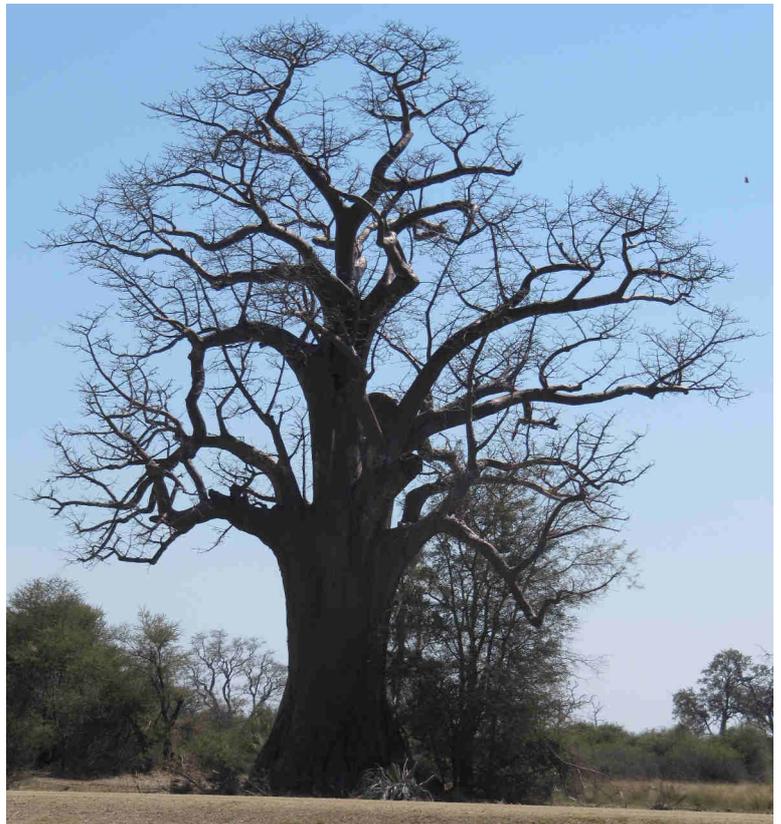


Waterfront at Ngepi

After breakfast we returned to our wonderful tree house, where I did the necessary washing, Mike played with hf radio and antenna, etc and then the day was spent enjoying nature and reading and just relaxing. After dinner, sitting chatting and listening to the night sounds, we got to chatting about future trips and the idea was born that we will start looking out for an Iveco vehicle to convert into a camper van according to our needs and likes. Sadly the 101 is just not going to cut it and although Mike still intends building him up again, it will be to the original specs and not as our future off road vehicle.

Wednesday, 20 August

Another relaxed morning with shower, coffee and the sounds of nature before we headed off to the reception for our breakfast and then off to Mahangu Game Reserve for a game drive. We were in luck and saw straight away, a sable, then kudu, then a pair of warthog having a real humdinger of a fight. Just as I was about to start videoing this, the younger and smaller of the two turned tail, having decided he had had enough and took off 19 to the dozen. The older male (bigger certainly) chased him half-heartedly for a while before going off to help himself to a drink of water. We also saw hippo, zebra, baboons, monkeys and simply had a lovely lazy drive. En route home we stopped off at Mahangu River Lodge for a beer and shandy at the river's edge. It



One of the Baobab trees in Mahangu Game Reserve

has grown in size since we last camped here 8 years ago. There are now 8 campsites, not just the 3 we had at our disposal, plus they have added on to the other accommodation too. Mahangu is still as neat and good value for money as it was last time – perfectionist



The deck at Mahangu Safari Lodge

owners. In dire need of some cooler t-shirts, I bought three and then we returned to Ngepi for another relaxing and lazy afternoon. It was a little sad knowing we were going to be spending our last night at this idyllic location but that also meant we enjoyed it to our full capacity.

A note on the campsites: especially after having been past Mahangu again, we loved the tree house but both agreed the campsites were on the too small side, ablution facilities for camping not ideal and they are more expensive than Mahangu. I guess we know what our option will be for camping should there be a 'next time'.

Thursday, 21 August (Divindu – Susuwe Triangle. 233km, 4.5 hrs)

Another short day's travel today. We got up and packed up, then took ourselves off for breakfast and to settle the account. The journey continued after we bought a few more Tafel beers in the village. We first made a



Popa Rapids

detour to the Ngoabaca Community Camp on the northern side of the Okavango River, to have a look at the Popa Rapids from their view site. One has to pay N\$40 now to enter the view site, which is from a quaint little sand beach. The views are beautiful.

Their campsites are unfortunately falling into disrepair, which is a pity as they have great shaded trees and fantastic views from the viewing platforms. The campsite we



A neglected campsite at Ngoabaca Community Camp

The gentleman at the wildlife centre where we paid our dues gave us a very strange look and said, hesitantly, yes... but if we were going to camp, then we would be paying for that at the campsite itself. Well, as we started driving through the park I began to understand his puzzled look and realised it was not simply a matter of broken English and misunderstanding. He had understood alright and probably thought us nuts! It really was some offroading with very deep soft sand sections. En route to the campsite we saw, spotted by Mike under a tree, a lone bull elephant. Thank fully we snapped a photo of him – he was to be the only elephant we were to see during our stay in this camp.

When we arrived at the campsite, it looked pretty full to us, something which was confirmed by the gentleman at 'reception'. However, he asked us to wait while he quickly phoned someone. A conversation in his own language with the person on the other side and he looked at Mike again and asked if we could wait. Someone was coming. And so we waited – until eventually another African gentleman arrived and said that they were fully booked, but ... he would make a plan and then offered us campsite no. 1. A large campsite, right next to the river's edge, under a lovely shady tree – perfect! Except of course that it was the furthest from the ablution facilities.

There was talk that camping would no longer be possible here once the lodge is fully functional. There is a notice at reception that 4 campsites will remain. This is good news, but the downside is of course that these will be booked out well in advance.

visited had the straw from the kitchen and ablutions stripped and was spread out in the parking area. Such a pity. Another instance when funds derived from the camp site is not being reinvested into maintenance.

Onwards to the 4x4 campsite of Nambwa. The trip was pretty much 'more of the same', long stretches of very straight road, not much traffic and the obligatory kraals and cattle along the way. When we reached Nambwa we asked if we may first go through and view the campsite prior to booking in.



View on the Kwando Swamps from the old Fort Doppies ruins

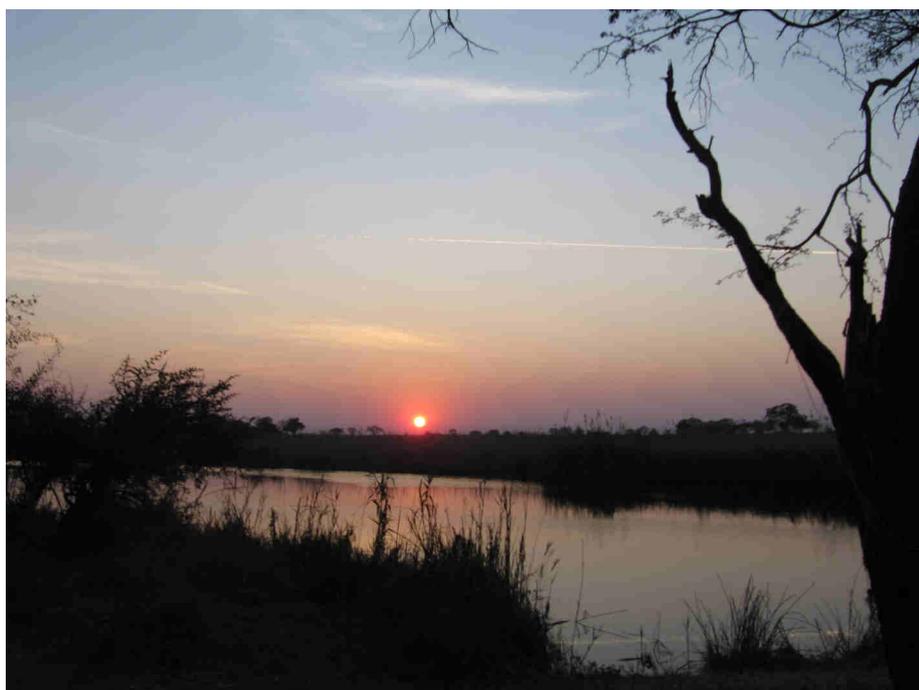
We had a lovely afternoon listening to the bird sounds and reading when said same gentleman appeared in our campsite again, some hours later. After the obligatory polite chat about this and that, he came to the point. There was another couple who had travelled a long distance and were needing overnight camping. As our site was so large, would we mind sharing with them. He did reassure us that we had the option of saying no. However, there was no reason to do so and so we met Johann and Heidi from Windhoek. We all minded our own business, and stayed out of each other's way.

We were busy organising dinner when we heard loud splashes coming from the river bank right next to our camp site. Mike and Johann took off like shots with their respective torches looking for what we presumed must be hippo but to no avail. Torches off again and Mike back to reading I heard some scuffling just to the left of me. I asked Mike to shine the



Our campsite at Nambwa

torch in that general direction and there, no more than 8 meters from us, was a lone hippo scoffing his dinner from the scrubby grass of the campsite. We called Johann and Heidi and went for



Sunrise at Nambwa

the camera. Mike's point and shoot camera got black pictures, and Johann's flash refused to work. Non the less, the Hippo's presence was welcomed. It wandered between the other camp sites, but by the tone and volume of their conversations, they were oblivious to it's presence. After we had our one pot dinner and they their braai, however, Mike and I joined them around their camelthorn wood campfire for a pleasant chat. We did not stay long and it was off the bed, pretty soon.

A good night's sleep, an early morning with coffee and a rusk for Mike and so began

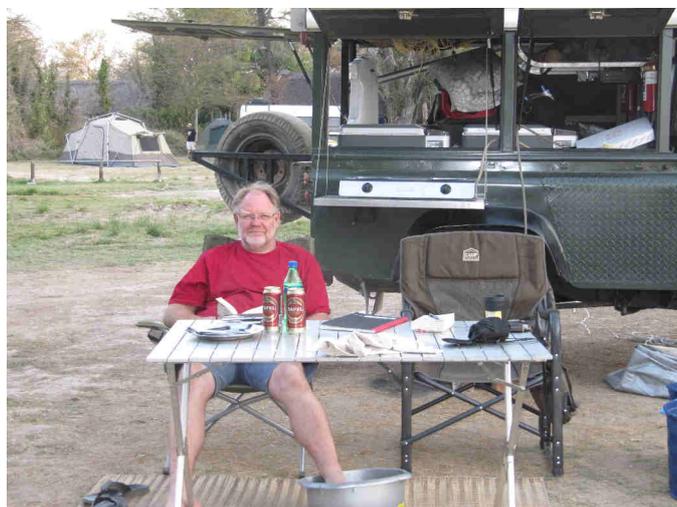
Friday, 22 August (Nambwa to Kasane. 288km, nearly 8hrs in total)

Mike did still go and shower, I opted for sticking my head under the cold water tap and washing head and face that way. Once packed and ready we said goodbye to Johann and Heidi and off we were en route to Katima Mulila. What a lovely little town it is from the point of what is available in this gateway to Africa. An OK, Shoprite, PicknPay (our choice) to Bears, and Tekkie World, and Korea shop right next to China shop etc. We bought a few supplies and then off we went again having decided to not spend one night here but rather cross the border from Namibia into Botswana at Ngoma. The Namibian side was quick, easy and painless. But then,

once through that firstly Ntethe overheated again but that was quickly sorted (ML – need to sort that blerry air-lock). Then came the obligatory vet check point. A lone lady informed us that she needed to search our vehicle and remove all meat, fruit and vegetable products. Having just topped up on fresh tomatoes in Katima, I was not impressed but both of us managed to hide it successfully. She asked what was in the freezer and Mike replied, frozen soup. She then wanted to search our fridge and sitting right on top? ... the fresh tomatoes. Looking most apologetic, she said to me, “I must take these – they can contain fruit fly”. I said nothing but put on a most downcast and sad face while Mike shrugged his shoulders and said, ‘you must take them? Oh – ok then.” I guess my acting lessons from primary school still pay off. She took pity on me, said nothing, just quietly returned the tomatoes to the fridge and with a beaming smile I offered her an ice cold grapefruit which she gladly accepted. See, no bribe – it was not necessary – just gratitude on both sides.

The border affair on the Botswana side was another story altogether. There were so many people and vehicles and despite that the passport checks etc went quickly. But then it came to the vehicle and there we encountered a queue snaking all the way out of the building. Oh dear – computer was down, and we were dealing with African officialdom having to resort to doing everything by hand. Some of the time was passed chatting to other Pietermaritzburgers who were both in the queue behind Mike and like me, the others waiting outside. An hour later and eventually vehicle processed and monies paid we were free to leave and continue through Chobe National Park en route to Kasana. Driving at the requisite 80 kms per hour through the park, we were privileged to see both giraffe and then a while later, a large group of elephant, cross the road.

Once in Kasana we decided to secure ourselves a campsite first and then sort sim card etc. We stopped at Chobe Safari Lodge (very very nice for those who have money and stay in the lodge!) and Mike went in to enquire about camping while I stayed at the vehicle. The longer he was gone, the more certain I was that we were probably in luck. What we have both come to realise is that the time of just travelling, arriving at a spot and pulling in to camp is probably totally gone. There is such booming tourist trade going on in these regions that from now on, booking will probably be essential – and possibly way in advance too! As luck would have it, yes there was a campsite, no. 6 and so we went through to the campsite to ‘secure’ it, only to find on signing in that someone else was already registered to campsite no. 6. And sure enough, another landy with roof top tent was parked there. But ... we were not impressed with the site at all! It was small, and totally enclosed bar the entrance with shrubs and brush, very hot and dusty and far from the ablution facilities. We decided there and then that we did not want to stay here. While we were waiting for the official at the gate to sort out the confusion of two vehicles in the same campsite, Mike started phoning around regarding other options and possibilities. Long story short, we returned to the reception of Chobe Safari Lodge and reversed our booking and payment. We had received answer from Thebe River Safari’s that they had space but operated on a ‘first come first served’ basis.



Thebe River Safari's Lodge

We had a quick look at the campsite on offer, no. 2, decided we would take it, completed the admin and then went to find a sim card for Mike's mobile phone. He ran himself ragged while I once again stayed at the vehicle. Once sorted we returned to Thebe and pulled into our campsite. By now it was 15h50 and we had not eaten anything all day. It was only once the vehicle was parked and we started unpacking that we realised that while there was a power point, and a rubbish bin – there was no tap!! No running water?!! Mike took himself off to fill two of our buckets with the good stuff and bring them back to the vehicle. We had breakfast/lunch/whatever just on 4pm. Did that taste good!! Then it was feet up for Mike and a little time spent reading. I schlepped off to the ablution facilities for a good scrub down. What to say? Water – hot. Ablutions – far away, but clean. Privacy in the ablution facilities? Non existent. You have to undress and dress in an open area. Ce la vie. It is extremely basic and while we have river views and can hear the hippo, this is definitely just a one night, stop-over, necessity dictates type of camp site. And to the left of us ... the pool and bar with TV!! And some rugby match going on and being commentated on. Quite a 'rude' interruption to our, thus far, news, tv and radio free holiday!!

Right – after such a late meal we are both not very hungry yet and it is nearing 8pm. We will just settle for some scrumptious chicken soup and a slice of camp baked bread for dinner and then, possibly, a not too late night.

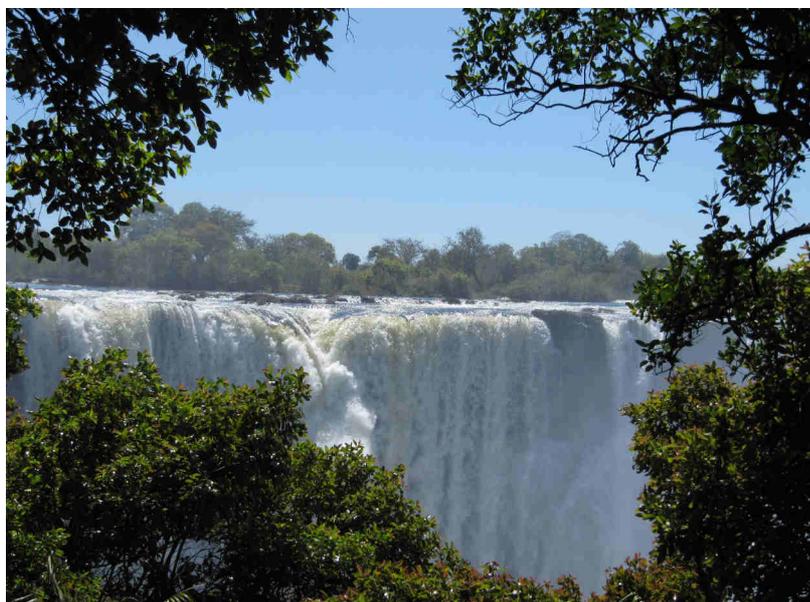
Saturday, 23 August (Kasane - Vic Falls – Senyati. 168km, 5.75 hrs)



Having decided that the camp at Thebe is over the river while a troop of baboon ambled down river and the hippo grunted once or twice. Then it was off to the shower for me and Mike enjoyed his coffee and rusks in peace. Vehicle packed, roof top tent down and Mike went off for his shower before we continued on our travels, deciding to rather spend the next few nights at Senyati.

Despite the frustration of border crossings, we braved the effort that entails to go through to Zimbabwe to see Victoria Falls. Bar our Tree House stay, this was the highlight of our trip for Gudrun. She had had seeing the falls in person on her

'bucket list' for a long time. We found parking quite close to the entrance to the Falls, showed our passports and paid the hundreds of rands to gain entry, and then joined the many others who were there to witness this spectacular display of nature. What was nice is that there were no touts hanging around to trouble you. The water pumped over the falls and in this so often dry continent it was magnificent to see the volumes of water relentlessly falling over the rocks and showering all who looked at them with enjoyment and wonder with its soft spray. I know it was an expensive diversion, what with entrance fees, border crossing costs etc. but we were very glad to have done it. Before embarking on the outbound journey back to Botswana, we found a Swiss deli, bought croissants and a pie for lunch and then we left Vic Falls behind us.



Back through the border posts (quick on the return journey), we headed to Senyati Safari Camp. Once again we learnt that in future, bookings are going to have to be the order of the day. Nothing was available bar a communal campsite with some guides and a group of Russian tourists. Note : we are extremely lucky to have a fully equipped vehicle, including kitchen as the group of Russians had totally occupied and taken over the communal kitchen area.



Mike and I put out our chairs and sat, in a dust bowl I must admit!, reading our books and chatting until it was shortly before 5pm and time to stroll down to the bar area and adjacent watering hole for the ellies.

We had just got our drinks and settled down, when the first bull arrived to have his sundowner of fresh water. Chasing some to him, annoying monkeys out of his way, he drank deeply and then ambled off again. He was closely followed by a herd of ellies with two gorgeous little ones amongst them. Their thirst slated, it was a wonderfully refreshing mud bath. We were rewarded with a further group of elephant before we returned to our campsite for a shower and dinner before it was bedtime.



Sunday, 24 August (Senyati to Francistown, 485km, 8 hrs)

A not too early start with coffee and rusks and off we went again, having the previous night decided what other places we wanted to go and look at and camp at before returning to South Africa. It was not to be. Having

negotiated the extremely deep and soft sand back to the main road, and watching the vehicle engine temperature very carefully, we had not travelled very far on the tar road when madman screamed at us and, the engine had overheated again. No problem, been here before, I jumped out and bled the system again, and off we were. However, the temperature rose again shortly, unlike the other times. Obviously more damage was done this time round. Spending quite some time at the side of the road with Mike employing all his engineering skills and vehicle knowledge in an attempt to avoid having to have our trusted Intethe flatbedded from there back to South Africa, he managed to get the engine to run relatively cold by removing the spring from the thermostat and we started the journey, very very long journey, home at a limping pace of 80kms per hour. At least the temperature stayed low and water was not pushed out of the system. However, every time we stopped Mike ended up bleeding the engine as water started to be expelled as soon as the engine was turned off. The engine needed to run faster than a fast idle to keep the water from escaping. If things stayed as they were, then we would not need a flat bed. We decided then to cut the holiday short and make it our priority to nurse Intethe back home.

We finally made it through to Tati River Lodge in Francistown by sunset. I was *not* going to do a camping night especially as Mike wanted us to leave at sparrow's again tomorrow morning. A tour bus arrived shortly before we did, and booked out all normal rooms. As a result, we booked into a more expensive 'studio' which while falling apart a tad, but was clean and usable. Next time we will try the Woodlands Top Over to the north of Francistown – were given their brochure at one of the Vet Gates – looks very nice.



Tati River Lodge Studio

I contacted Rolf, my cousin, from here and asked if we could change our night to stay over to tomorrow night. He immediately offered to be of any assistance he could and was looking forward to our visit.

Monday, 25 August (Francistown – Pretoria. 658km, 11 hours)

We did manage to leave at 6am and continued our journey limping towards the border. That was our first aim – to get into SA and then if a flat bed was needed, it would be so much easier. Either we looked more weary than we thought, or we are seriously delusional about our age, but at the border post into SA, the customs police officer greeted us with “Good morning, sir, madam. And how are the senior citizens this morning”?!! I was horrified and protested at being called a geriatric. He in turn said, “no, no madam! I was using the politically correct term.” By now Mike had worked out that we could push the speed a little to just below 100km/hr, as long as the EGT temperature was not pushed higher than 500 deg Celsius. The extra Mad Man temperature gauges made monitoring engine conditions a lot easier. So while still slow, the journey did speed up a little.

To avoid the stop and gos on the way to Pretoria from Martin's Drift, we turned right onto the R572, stopping in Lephalale (Ellisras) for some toasted sandwiches and a brief rest. I had forgotten how steep some of these hills were, and we climbed up some of these at 45km/hr in 3rd gear to prevent the EGT temperature from going over 500 degrees.

We continued to Pretoria and Rolf and Karin's, arriving just on 5pm. I am amazed at how much Pretoria has changed. Obviously the road name changes, but also the population composition.

We spent a lovely, enjoyable evening with Rolf and family, the boys coming in and out as their lives dictated. A not too late night and a wonderful warm soft bed for the night. Great stuff.

Tuesday, 26 August (Pretoria – Home. 590km, 8.3 hrs)

A more leisurely morning as we wanted to avoid the worst of Pretoria and Johannesburg traffic. We had coffee and homemade rusks and eventually left on 8am. We stopped at the Total Pertoport just south of Johannesburg for fuel, and were surprised to meet Eben Henning there – what a small world!

The trip home was uneventful, bar stopping off at the “smallest church” (Llandaff Oratory) in Van Reenen and having a wonderful lunch of lasagne and salad at the coffee shop next door with the most gorgeous views. The one stop garage shops will not see me again in this area. It was a tad windy but the break did us good and we left feeling ready for the last stint of the trip home.



Llandaff Oratory



The view from the coffee shop next to the small chapel

As we got to the N3, traffic cops stopped us to let a 1000 wheeler onto the road in front of us – BAD timing! We followed this long train for a 5km at 15km/hr before we were able to pass it on the LHS on a straight section of the road, where the train could travel down the centre of the road, allowing vehicles past in the single lanes, one down and one up.



The homecoming itself: wonderful! The animals were ecstatic, dogs and cat alike. We unpacked the bare necessities and just stretched our legs, and enjoyed the comfort of being home.

Further comments:

Bookings: It looks like the days of not booking accommodation at the popular lodges and campsites in Namibia and Botswana are over during high season, which is now nearly the whole year, except for the hot summer period from the middle of December to the end of February. Even Oppie Koppie in Kamanjab was fully booked – we got the last campsite there (not that we will be looking at staying there again...). You will still find accommodation without booking, but you will struggle to find decent camps sites, and will waste a lot of time travelling around in search of a decent place to stay at. Will have to think about this in future, as it does not give flexibility any more to allow one to stay longer at nice places and shorter at the not so nice spots.

Tyre Monitor: I have never used one of these monitors before, and decided to buy the Tireguard for this trip from www.tireguard.co.za I decided for this system as it was the only one I could get which could be set for pressures less than 1 bar. From the word go I was not happy with it as it does not continually show pressure and temperature readings like those of its competitors. To get readings, you have to press a button repeatedly until you get the readings of the tyre you want to monitor. I mentioned this to the supplier before I fitted it and was told *“This is a set-and-forget system that does not need watching, so no disadvantage in not seeing all readings at once.”*

In spite of my best efforts, I could not get the monitor to get updated readings from all tyres. I reinstalled all sensors, tested their battery voltages (they were all new), tried different positions in my vehicle, even holding the monitor out of my window for 20 minutes, from where it should definitely have gotten readings from the right hand tyres. It did not, and eventually the dreaded Lost Sensor warning came up. Half way into the trip I gave up with the unit and packed it away.

It definitely did not prevent me forking out R3850 for a new tyre to replace my front left burst tyre. From some reports I know that it works for some people, but it definitely did not in my defender. As such, I will assume that I had a faulty unit.

Even if it did work, it will not give accurate tyre temperature readings as the bulk of the sensor is exposed to the outside air. I can confirm this as 2 of the working sensors on the first morning showed temperatures of about 10 degrees even though the tyres were quite warm to the touch – the ambient temperature was less than 10 degrees at that stage. The second negative thing for me is that continuous readings are not shown. The results could have been shown for all tyres, moving from one tyre to the next automatically, like other TPMS out there. The third negative reason is possible damage of the sensors (even though theft might be a bigger problem than this, in spite of the locking rings).

Needless to say, I returned the unit to the supplier and am awaiting a refund ...

Dash Cam: I originally bought a BlackVue, which is low profile and has great video resolution. Unfortunately it died when the vehicle battery went flat and when I attempted to start it – the resultant voltage surges did not agree with the dash cam. I then bought a no name brand from a dealer on LCCSA. Seems robust, but video quality is not great. An updated model was then advertised by the same guy, and I bought that. The video quality was much better, but the plastic housing and windscreen suction cup assembly was terrible, resulting in vibrations, which are no good for the picture quality. This unit also keeps freezing.

I reverted back to the older unit, but that stopped recording during the trip, even though the red recording light was on. I only realised this when I wanted to download the video from the blue light brigade. I got it working periodically and suspect that the micro sd card needs to be reformatted.

When I get back I will have a look at getting a quality recorder again, like the Blackvue. Will look at others like Garmin as well.

As the saying goes “Goedkoop is duurkoop”. This also applies to the Tire Monitor!

Variable Vane Turbo: The turbo upgrade is certainly worth it. We were able to maintain a more consistent speed of more or less 110km/hr than before, without any fuel consumption penalties. If anything, fuel consumption is better – will do a more accurate fuel consumption analysis later.

The turbo came into it's own in the soft sandy sections, like in the Nambwa Game Reserve. The increase in low down torque available ensured that I was able to idle in 3rd gear between 1000 and 1500 rpm most of the time with normally inflated tyres, only having to change down to 2nd gear for the really soft and deep sandy sections, and once into 1st gear up a soft sandy incline. Low range was not necessary. I was able to idle through really bumpy sections in 2nd or 1st gear at revs as low as 700rpm.

A great investment – certainly to be recommended. I did not turn the fuelling up, as I was not interested in gaining power at the top end. In fact, I set the fuelling so that the maximum EGT temperature I can get is 680 degrees Centigrade.

“Overheating” problem: It turns out that the cylinder head gasket was blown between 2 cylinder pairs. Thankfully the head is ok. I had this problem before I left. Water was filling the expansion tank, and I falsely assumed that it had to do with the new pressure cap. I monitored the engine temperature throughout, and saw that it was consistently sitting at 91 degrees C. When using the aircon and going uphill, it rose to 92 degrees, so it was hardly fluctuating. The problem was thus not from a hot running engine.

The problem could have been due to a cylinder head gasket which was faulty from new. Luckily we were able to nurse the vehicle back home without incurring further damage. This would not have been possible with a modern vehicle

The installed Mad Man engine monitoring system certainly paid for itself on this trip. I'm sure that without it's early warnings that I would have ended up with a blown engine and provided the Cruiser boys with an opportunity to photograph Intethe on the back of a flat bed. It also provided me with interesting transfer box temperatures. Under load, after a long day, the transfer box temperature went up to 109 degrees C. When it got hotter than 105 degrees, it started leaking oil through the top lever seals, leaving splatters of oil drops on the rear of the vehicle. As a result I will be installing the transfer box mod side plate which increases the oil capacity. It also has cooling fins which help cool the oil.

Insurance: We always sort insurance before trips, making sure that possible medical situations are insured, as well vehicle damage, breakdowns, repatriation etc. What is often not covered is the repatriation of a body should someone in your party die. In eg Mozambique, you cannot have the body cremated. As such, the body has to be embalmed, and flown back in a sealed lead lined casket, according to what my insurance broker has been told. This can cost a few hundred thousand Rands. There is insurance for this. Not cheap though. Need to check the validity of this.